2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

that is growing in the mother.[1] Though this notion is not fully thought out, this much is clear: the *rayi* is a quantity, which increases with growth and diminishes with old age and in all forms of illness; it is impersonal, without sex or individual features; it is common to and infinitely divisible among all animate beings. It is a life principle or life soul, the Latin *anima*, and nothing more specific or personal. All that is peculiar to the individual human being, his appearance, his character, his particular spirit and intellect, comes from the two other entities, *fifingi* and, especially, *kuci*.

As death represents the complete severance of body and *anima*, so disease weakens the link and attacks the life principle. In sleep, body and life soul are separated temporarily and more lightly; normally, the *rayi* will return to the body; but one cannot predict that this will always happen, so that a person may die in his sleep. It is then, incidentally, when the life soul is loosened from the body, that it can be harmed by witches, who, as we shall hear, 'feed' on the *rayi*. When I dream, my *rayi* wanders about and sees all the things that come to me in the dream. But the *rayi* does not wander alone; it takes something with it that is, though not of the body, yet of bodily shape; for I may appear to others in their dreams, as in turn I dream of other persons. It is not, of course, the real, full person that is met with in dreams (for the real person may be away in other parts, or asleep at home), but only his or her image or shadow—the *fifingi*.

Fifingi means 'shadow' much as we understand the word, that is, the shadow thrown by men and animals, not the shade caused by inanimate things. But the word has a second, mystic, meaning, best translated as 'shadow soul'; for when a person dies and his body decomposes the *fifingi* continues to exist and will still be visible (as in our dreams of dead people). Normally, nothing further can be said about the *fifingi*; beyond appearing in dreams it has no effectiveness. It is not identical with the dead whose disembodied souls may act as the guardians of the living or be invoked in sacrifices: these souls or spirits represent that other entity, the *kuci*, to which we shall presently return. But in certain cases the *fifingi*, too, are active after death; they are said to find no rest, to haunt houses or localities, scare travellers, and to cause nightmares when they visit people in their dreams. This happens when a person, having died an unnatural death or in a strange place, was buried without the proper rites; in which case a symbolic burial *in absentia* will lay the ghost. More vaguely one also believes that evil persons are similarly condemned to wander about restlessly after death. In either case, however, it is not really

[1] This rule refers specifically to conception, not to sexual intercourse; for the parents may practise *coitus interruptus*.

9:Nadel E-5 (1934-1935) 1935 FF52 Nupe FF52

the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.[2]

II.

The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *'ti dzana*, the 'head of Dzana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Dzana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'[3] The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leiji nyá 'tsu*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (*e.g.*, of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lèse majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *ndóce*, the 'father of the shooting,' *i.e.*, the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

Whether such beliefs went deeper than this: whether there existed a general superstition which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[2] A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technic as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technic which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also MAN, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

[3] The *ledu* are also known by the name *dogari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dogari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *tsie-cígbeci*, lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.